The Evolution Of The Snob

THOMAS SERGEANT PERRY

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The Evolution Of The Snob

BY

THOMAS
SERGEANT
PERRY

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The Evolution of the Snob.

It is fortunately unnecessary to begin a study of this kind with a definition of snobbishness. Every one who does not know what it is that is to be studied, may at least observe the quality in his neighbors if not in himself; and it will be readily seen that snobbishness, whatever the form in which it manifest itself, is the result of a consciousness of difference in social position between the snob and others. Thackeray's immortal "Book of Snobs" — a work that will be of infinite service to

the future sociologist — makes this statement very clear. From the crude self-abasement that affects the humbler citizen on meeting a duke, for example, to the subtler pretentiousness of more complicated relations, it becomes plain that the inspiring cause of the degradation of individual dignity, which is known as snobbishness, is due to an uneasy sense of inferiority. It may perhaps be worth our while to hunt for the origin of this quality, in order to ascertain whether it is a constituent part of human nature, or a temporary development that has arisen from peculiar social conditions.

I.

THACKERAY tells us, in the Prefatory Remarks to the "Book of Snobs," that, "first, the World was made: then, as a matter of course, Snobs. They existed for years and years, and were no more known than America. But presently — *ingens patebat tellus* — the people became darkly aware that there was such a race. Not above five and twenty years since, a name, an expressive monosyllable, arose to designate that race." But, it is fair to ask, is this statement exact? Why was it only about 1815 that snobs began to be perceived, if they had abounded since the crea-

tion of the world? To be sure, philistinism existed in England, as Mr. Matthew Arnold has pointed out, before he imported the name from Germany to brand that old conservative trait: may not snobbishness have shared its universal sway and its long-lived obscurity? Even here, however, a distinction should be drawn; and we may well wonder if any quality can be said to exist before its opposite also exists, against which the first is seen in bold relief. Thus bigotry can only be affirmed of some men, when others are open-minded. It would be inaccurate, for example, to call savages bigoted, whatever the fervor with which they adhere to a rude religion: a man is only bigoted when he clings to the

wrong in spite of opportunities to think and act more wisely. In the same way, the conservatism of the English became philistinism when men wilfully closed their eyes to a new light. The word first came into use in Germany, because in that country conservatism first stood out distinct against intelligence. The naming of the fault implied the correlative virtue. A new-born infant is not selfish when it cries for food: a selfish child is one that is knowingly indifferent to the comfort of others. Even now philistinism is a rare word in English, because the density of the conservatism that blinds that country in intellectual matters is known only to a few: the ignorant public mistake it for the

normal condition of man. Snobbishness, however, is a familiar vice in England: the name has for half a century branded a large number of persons, and this comparative modernness of the word renders it possible to suppose that the fault may not be as old as the race.

Every student will acknowledge that it is rash to imagine that the faults of any given time have surely shown themselves in the same way at all times. Right and wrong, it may be acknowledged, have always existed; but the delicate boundary between right and wrong has varied enormously at different periods. It is easy to see the beginning and to trace the growth of the spirit of commercial enterprise in that country. Mercan-

tile shrewdness is something relatively new, and it bears but a fanciful resemblance to the cruder form of adventure that we find among the English when they were uncivilized. In our own country, it is clear that altered conditions continually modify the shape in which men's desire to succeed, and their rank selfishness, shall assert themselves. The present ideal of a successful politician, again, is different from that which has prevailed at other periods of American history. In short, vice assumes a different shape at different times, under the impulse of temptation and opposition, exactly as the burglar's art adapts itself to the improvements in the manufacture of safes, or as offence and defence

zigzag through the history of the materials of warfare. Fortunately, virtue exhibits the same pliability, and meets new perils with new safeguards, adapting itself to altered conditions, and striving, as in the agitation in behalf of temperance, to lead the world to other views of duty and responsibility. The methods, too, are changed, as in the modern substitution of an approving conscience for the rigid compliance with written law. Still further, just as the burglars and the safe-makers in their race depend on the improvements in the mechanical arts, — on the manufacture of steel, for instance, — so the vices and correlative virtues of any given time depend equally on the existing social status.

The inborn rapacity of savages is modified by civilization into the mixture of skill and selfishness that now makes up business capacity. The underlying principle is the same — self-protection and advancement; but the manifestations are various, and while men have at all times the same selfish yearnings, these will make themselves evident only when they have some chance of success.

II.

In the early part of the last century, if there were snobs, they succeeded in eluding the observation of a number of keen-eyed men; and if at a period when the foibles of humanity were detected with unfailing certainty, and derided with real bitterness, snobbishness was not mentioned, we may be perhaps free to conjecture that the fault — or possibly it would be more discreet to call it foible — did not then exist. This is a statement that will disappoint the optimist; but if the fact can first be proved, an explanation will soon be found. Where we should first look

for early caricature of snobbishness would be in the comedies of the Restoration. In them the mirror began to be held up to modern society, and men and women who were actual beings began to make their appearance in literature. In Ben Jonson's comedies, in those of Beaumont and Fletcher, we are in a world that is not our world, but is an intellectual creation which it was agreed to accept as a conventional representation of facts known to be different; just as the scene of a good part of French fiction is laid among impossible people who live impossible lives amid modern upholstery. The characters in the plays just mentioned are abstract beings who go through the motions

of being real, but are not creatures of flesh and blood. After the Restoration, there was a difference; and, repulsive as are the brutal heroes and heroines of the comedies of that time, they are in possession of certain human qualities; they speak prose, and we understand them. They are, to be sure, treated conventionally, — for all literature hugs conventionality, — but they walk the earth, and are not remote and lifeless accumulations of qualities. The scene of a comedy of Beaumont and Fletcher is in a no-man's land: in one of the Restoration, we are in London, and the difference is great. The remoteness of the Jacobean plays is obvious: we cannot open at any page without being in this un-

real region, which is variously styled Russia, Italy, or Spain, as it may happen, but it is none of these; rather is it a country bounded by the four walls of the theatre. In "Love's Pilgrim," the scene is laid "in Spain and at sea;" but it might just as well be the neighborhood of Moscow or Florence. In Act IV., Scene 2, there is the following conversation. Marc-Antonio enters, carried by two soldiers: —

"*Servant.* This is the house, sir.
Marc. Enter it, I pray you;
For I am faint, although I think my wound
Be nothing. — Soldiers, leave us now; I thank you.
1 Sold. Heaven send you health, sir!
Serv. Let me lead you in."

We are in a region as remote and

vague as is that of one of Grimm's stories: we are anywhere and nowhere. But in the Restoration comedy we are in London. To be sure, the art of applying local color is not to be learned in a day, and the flash and fire of these comedies are as exaggerated as the neat epigrams of modern French plays: but there is no breath of romance to disturb us; we have to do with characters only different from living men and women by being wittier and more depraved. The craft of the dramatist set them in a bright light, which exaggerated the tints and shadows. And if their sharp eyes failed to detect our favorite weakness in the men of that time, it could only have been because it was not then prominent. That they

saw faults, and portrayed them in their scandalous records, is undeniable; and certainly the showing that they make of human nature is a very dark one. Rascals of every sort adorn their pages; sots reel across the stage, and libertines pursue their facile chase; the whole rank society of a time of license crowds the boards. But the snob is missing: he was not yet born. Wycherley's "Plain Dealer," for example, would have immortalized snobs, if snobs had then existed. Manly (Act I., Scene 1) says, "I would jostle a proud, strutting, overlooking coxcomb, at the head of his sycophants, rather than put out my tongue at him when he were past me; would frown in the arrogant, big, dull face

of an overgrown knave of business, rather than vent my spleen against him when his back were turned; would give fawning slaves the lie whilst they embrace or commend me; cowards whilst they brag; call a rascal by no other title, though his father had left him a duke's; laugh at fools aloud before their mistresses; and must desire people to leave me when their visits grow at last as troublesome as they were at first impertinent." And afterwards, when remonstrated with by Freeman for speaking in this frank way to Lord Plausible, and when he is asked, "How the devil could you turn a man of his quality down-stairs? You use a lord with very little ceremony, it seems," Manly answers, —

"A lord! what, thou art one of those who esteem men only by the marks and value fortune has set upon 'em, and never consider intrinsic worth! But counterfeit honor will not be current with me: I weigh the man, not his title; 'tis not the king's stamp can make the metal better or heavier. Your lord is a leaden shilling which you bend every way, and debases the stamp he bears, instead of being raised by it."

It is not to the comedies of the Restoration that one would naturally go for an early statement of Burns's famous lines; but Wycherley preceded the poet of the period of revolution in perceiving that the rank is but the guinea's stamp, although, naturally, he gave to the thought a turn charac-

teristic of his time in which he lived. No one is ever the first to say a good thing, and what is best in literature is often only an effort to place in a permanent setting what is already more or less familiar. In this case, it certainly seems, at first sight, as if enough had been found in the severity of this denunciation of Manly's, to prove that snobbishness of the most approved pattern was rampant; but possibly this conjecture would be as hasty as would be the assumption that Wycherley was animated by as keen a love of freedom as was Burns, because the two men expressed the same truth in almost the same language. Nowhere in his comedies, however, or in those of his contemporaries, do we come across any

portrayal of the fault we are now considering; and the vice that Manly condemns is what a great many writers of the time also condemn, — namely, mere parasitism, or truckling to the great with flattery and humiliation, in order to get some advantages from their society. This habit, as we shall see, was common enough, and called forth general reprobation. It is certainly not unknown now, but it is to be distinguished from the more delicate, if no less offensive, social blight which is known as snobbishness; and the distinction may be clearly seen by comparing the abundant evidence to be gathered from the literature of the last century, with the present or recent condition of social matters. Their novels, plays,

and essays are full of description and criticism of the men and women of the time; and from those pages we may get a very definite notion of the various topics that interested our great-grandfathers, and thus may learn the extent and nature of their sympathies, tastes, aversions, and prejudices.

III.

While it would be impossible to quote all the passages in which no mention is made of snobbishness, there is yet no lack of examples that may testify to the opinion current, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, with regard to men's relations to their social superiors. And the first thing that will be noticed is the frank acceptance of social superiority and inferiority. This condition, it is obvious, deprives snobbishness of one of its most powerful weapons, pretentiousness; although, of course, it leaves the way open for flattery, and the

moralists of that time are continually bearing witness to the existence of this fault. Pretentiousness, however, they do not mention. The status of society, with its strict division of castes, is accepted as something established; and their whole aim is to urge men to do their duty in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call them. To be sure, in the "Tatler," No. 19, we find this statement: "There is nothing can give a man of any consideration greater pain than to see order and distinction laid aside amongst men, especially when the rank (of which he is himself a member) is intruded upon by such as have no pretence to that honor. The appellation of *Esquire* is the

most notoriously abused in this kind of any class amongst men; insomuch, that it is become almost the subject of derision." Yet even here, while the change is mentioned, it is condemned, and elsewhere the relative position of patron and dependent is accepted without a murmur, as in No. 196, where we read, "How beautiful is the life of a patron who performs his duty to his inferiors! A worthy merchant who employs a crowd of artificers! A great lord who is generous and merciful to the several necessities of his tenants! A courtier who uses his credit and power for the welfare of his friends! These have, in their several stations, a quick relish of the exquisite pleasure of

doing good. In a word, good patrons are like the guardian angels of Plato, who are ever busy, though unseen, in the care of their wards: but ill patrons are like the deities of Epicurus, supine, indolent, and unconcerned; though they see mortals in storms and tempests, even while they are offering incense to their power." And throughout a similar lesson is incalculated: "It is a mistaken sense of superiority, to believe a figure or equipage gives men precedence to their neighbors. Nothing can create respect from mankind, but laying obligations upon them. . . . The good old way among the gentry of England, to maintain their pre-eminence over the lower rank, was by their bounty, munifi-

cence, and hospitality" (No. 180). Decorum is everywhere taught, but also due respect for the established conditions of society.

Certainly the absence of any reference to snobbishness from the pages of the "Spectator," is further presumptive evidence against, at least, the prominence of the fault at this time. These essays, it is superfluous to say, present a very nearly complete picture of society as it appeared to keen-eyed and remarkably intelligent observers, whose reproofs covered a vast number of subjects — from all forms of vice to the wearing of broad-brimmed hats; yet that peculiar weakness which we are now investigating has escaped all mention. If this were an accidental omis-

sion, it would certainly have been made good by some of the other writers of essays, who flourished in the last century, and have left us a complete picture of the interests and habits of that period; but even here we find no record of this form of social discontent. On the contrary, the fixity of the social system is everywhere accepted with due reverence, as if it were as immutable as a natural law, and these counsellors do not busy themselves about altering the established conditions: they accept these, and devote all their energy to adapting people to them, to taming a savage race, and drilling it into conformity with social, moral, and literary etiquette; and etiquette is not a revolutionary force. What

is perpetually insisted upon is the importance of good-breeding and decorum, and we are yet far from any mention of the thoughts and feelings which were destined to create an upheaval of the social world. Vice and ignorance were the special objects of the "Spectator's" shafts; and it was again the parasite about whom Steele wrote in No. 280, Jan. 21, 1712: "Falling in with the particular humor or manner of one above you, abstracted from the general rules of good behavior, is the life of a slave. A parasite differs in nothing from the meanest servant, but that the footman hires himself for bodily labor, subjected to go and come at the will of his master, but the other gives up his very soul."

Meanwhile, however, the conditions were changing, and there was growing up a new force which was destined to have enormous influence on social conditions; this was commerce, and we find its importance commented upon by Addison and Voltaire, while some of its results, the creation of large fortunes, are ridiculed by Foote among others. Thus, in the "Spectator," No. 21, Addison says: "It is the great advantage of a trading nation, that there are very few in it so dull and heavy, who may not be placed in stations of life which may give them an opportunity of making their fortunes." And in No. 69 he speaks with enthusiasm of the Royal Exchange: "There are," he says, "no

more useful members in a commonwealth than merchants. They knit mankind together in a mutual intercourse of good offices, distribute the gifts of nature, find work for the poor, add wealth to the rich, add magnificence to the great. Our English merchant converts the tin of his own country into gold, and exchanges his wool for rubies," etc. "Trade, without enlarging the British territories, has given us a kind of additional empire; it has made our landed estates infinitely more valuable than they were formerly, and added to them an accession of other estates as valuable as the lands themselves." Voltaire was struck with the vast difference between the aristocratic exclusiveness of France, and the way in which

the younger sons of English noblemen of the highest position entered into business, and thus enlarged the power of their country; whereas "whosoever reaches Paris from the depths of a distant province with money to spend, and a name in *ac* or *ille*, can talk about 'a man like me, a man of my quality,' and hold a merchant in supreme contempt. The merchant, too, so constantly hears his occupation spoken of with scorn, that he is fool enough to blush for it: yet I am not sure which is the more useful to a state, — a thickly be-powdered lord who knows at just what time a king gets up and goes to bed, while he acts the part of a slave in a minister's ante-room; or the merchant who enriches his country,

gives orders from his counting-house at Surat or Cairo, and contributes to the happiness of the globe" (*Lettres phil.*, x.).

As time went on, however, the disadvantages of the change began to make themselves manifest, and it was seen that wealth had a way of falling into the hands of other than aristocrats. Thus Mackenzie, the author of "The Man of Feeling," in No. 100 of the "Lounger," Dec. 30, 1786, says, "The influx of foreign riches, and of foreign luxury, which this country has of late experienced, has almost levelled every distinction but that of money amongst us. The crest of noble or illustrious ancestry has sunk before the sudden accumulation of wealth in vulgar hands; but

that were little, had not the elegance of manners, had not the dignity of deportment, had not the pride of virtue, which used to characterize some of our high-born names, given way to that tide of fortune which has lifted the low, the illiterate, and the unfeeling, into stations of which they were unworthy."

The new peril was yet bravely met. Already in the "Connoisseur," No. 102, for Jan. 8, 1750, we find these words: "Whatever value their progenitors may have formerly set upon their blood, it is now found to be of no value when put into the scale against solid, plebeian gold; nor would the most illustrious descendant from Cadwallader or the Irish kings scruple to debase his lineage

by an alliance with the daughter of a city plum, though all her ancestors were yeomen, and none of her family ever bore arms."

The clumsy blunders and aggressive ambitions of the new rich soon became a prominent object of satire; thus Foote, in his "Nabob," 1772, is very severe in his denunciation of the full-blown insolence of *parvenus*. In one scene the hero is represented as receiving instruction from a waiter in the art of throwing dice; he seeks other information too: —

"Well, but, Dick, as to the oath and phrase that are most in use at the club?

"*Waiter.* I have brought them here in this paper. As soon as your honor has got them by heart, I will

teach you when, and in what manner, to use them."

This is but trifling, however; for soon the nabob is told, "Corrupt as you may conceive this country to be, there are superior spirits living who would disdain an alliance with grandeur obtained at the expense of honor and virtue;" and he has to listen to much similar improving conversation that exposes the pretentiousness of those who have recently acquired riches. In his other plays, Foote attacked those steps in luxury which some thought were improvements, while to him they were lapses from old-fashioned simplicity; and here Foote was as conservative as Aristophanes himself.

This last quotation, however, is half

a century later than the "Spectator;" and in the interval the close connection which moralists have frequently noted, between prosperity and insolence, had made itself very conspicuous. The whole tendency of this great advance in wealth had been disturbing to the former sanctity of social lines, and contemporary writers are full of denunciations of the confusion that was caused by these new methods of obtaining consideration. It will be seen that the whole tone of the comment on the altered circumstances is one of deep regret, and thus very different from Addison's cheerful anticipations, and from the more modern view of the successful conduct of business. It was new, and that was one good reason for

condemning it; and it affected those who often were not aristocrats, which seemed a sufficient excuse for ridiculing it. It must be remembered, that after the "Tatler" and "Spectator," the essays of the last century were written mainly by men who, for one reason or another, were animated by conservative and aristocratic principles; and they were continually shocked or amused by the follies of those they called their inferiors. It was among the great that they found their patrons and readers; and, naturally, it was to the prejudices of these that they were prone to appeal.

Whatever their point of view, they saw very clearly what was going on about them; and even in the very middle of the last century, we may

detect traces of social disturbance, although these are trifling in comparison with the greater change that later times were to know. Thus in the "World," No. 125 (May 22, 1755), we find this indictment of social discontent: —

"If we observe the behavior of the polite part of this nation (that is, of *all* the nation), we shall see that their whole lives are one continued race; in which every one is endeavoring to distance all behind him, and to overtake, or pass by, all who are before him; every one is flying from his inferiors, in pursuit of his superiors, who fly from him with equal alacrity.

"Were not the consequences of this ridiculous pride of the most de-

structive nature to the public, the scene would be really entertaining. Every tradesman is a merchant, every merchant is a gentleman, and every gentleman one of the noblesse. We are a nation of gentry, *populus generosorum;* we have no such thing as common people among us: between vanity and gin, the species is utterly destroyed." After describing the social ambitions of mechanics, milliners, etc., the satirist goes on: "Every commoner of distinction is impatient for a peerage, and treads hard upon the heels of quality in dress, equipage, and expenses of every kind. The nobility, who can aim no higher, plunge themselves into debt and dependence, to preserve their rank; and are even then quickly overtaken by their unmerciful pursuers.

"The same foolish vanity that thus prompts us to imitate our superiors, induces also to be, or pretend to be, their inseparable companions; or, as the phrase is, to keep the *best company;* by which is always to be understood, such company as are much above us in rank or fortune, and consequently despise and avoid us in the same manner as we ourselves do our inferiors. By this ridiculous affectation are all the pleasures of social life, and all the advantages of friendly converse, utterly destroyed. We choose not our companions for their wit and learning, their good humor or good sense, but for their power of conferring this imaginary dignity. . . . Every young gentleman is taught to believe it is

more eligible, and more honorable, to destroy his time, his fortune, his morals, and his understanding, at a gaming-house with the *best company*, than to improve them all in the conversation of the most ingenious and entertaining of his equals," and so on; the picture is a familiar one to moralists.

The date which is assigned in this essay to the outbreak of this pernicious change is about fifty years earlier: "It is pleasant to observe how this race, converted into a kind of perpetual warfare between the *good* and *bad company* in this country, has subsisted for half a century last past."

Yet although the writer was Soame Jenyns, who wrote a book, once cele-

brated, — though now best known from Dr. Johnson's review of it, — on the "Origin of Evil," and may hence be regarded as an authority, it is yet to be remembered that most of those who reprove the present are apt to place the golden age, when its errors were unknown, at about that distance. The evidence already collected goes to show, however, that he was not far astray in this estimate; for it was towards the beginning of the eighteenth century that the change began. It will be noticed, that although in this onslaught its perils are pointed out, yet the real permanence of society is strongly insisted on. Good company is imitated and worshipped, but the distinctions of society are preserved

and fully recognized as an important part of the constitution of the universe; and while this is the view current among those outside of the charmed circle, we may find in Chesterfield's Letters a view of the world from what we may call the inside. This noble writer, whatever his faults, was certainly no hypocrite in his advice to his son; and when he gives him counsel as to the complimentary speeches he is to make at every court, and points out where these are to be uttered that they may infallibly reach their address, he shows only the same frankness that pervades every page of his manual of etiquette and worldly wisdom. In his letter CXXVIII., Oct. 9 (O.S.), 1747, he speaks as follows;

and his testimony is very valuable, coming as it does from a most experienced observer who has the enormous and extremely rare merit of saying what he really thinks. Here are his words: "Endeavor, as much as you can, to keep company with people above you. There you rise, as much as you sink with people below you; for (as I have mentioned before) you are whatever the company you keep is. Do not mistake, when I say company above you, and think that I mean with regard to their birth; that is the least consideration: but I mean with regard to their merit, and the light in which the world considers them.

"There are two sorts of good company: one, which is called the *beau*

monde, and consists of those people who have the lead in courts, and in the gay part of life: the other consists of those who excel in some particular and valuable art or science. For my own part, I used to think myself in company as much above me, when I was with Mr. Addison and Mr. Pope, as if I had been with all the princes in Europe. What I mean by low company, which should by all means be avoided, is the company of those who, absolutely insignificant and contemptible in themselves, think they are honored by being in your company, and who flatter every vice and every folly you have, in order to engage you to converse with them. . . . You may possibly ask me, whether a man has

it always in his power to get into the best company? and how? I say, yes, he has, by deserving it."

Certainly this testimony is valuable as proving the existence of an aristocracy that knew how to appreciate real worth wherever it appeared, and of a band of parasites who were not yet snobs. These open-minded noblemen had already been praised by Voltaire for their readiness to detect merit; and it is perfectly plain that they had not yet begun to regard themselves as possessors of a mysterious power, as it is that bad company was made up of gross flatterers and toad-eaters.

Elsewhere we find further evidence of the scorn that was felt for people who endeavored to rise in

life, and the frequency of the attack is convincing evidence of the prominence of the habit. Thus, once in the "Rambler," and again more frequently in the "Idler," Dr. Johnson held up to ridicule men who were endeavoring to change from one condition of society into another and higher one, and fully exposed their groundless pretensions. The first was Misocapelus, who is immortalized in Nos. 116 and 123 of the "Rambler" (April 23 and May 21, 1751). This unfortunate being was, to be sure, the second son of a country gentleman; but his mother, "the daughter of a wealthy citizen of London," had fired our hero "with the splendor and dignity of London and of trade," so that he bound him-

self to a haberdasher, and in time became rich. All his gold, however, could not remove the taint of trade. He tried to "commence gentleman;" but his old companions persisted in recognizing him, without any terror of his new sword, "which was, notwithstanding, of uncommon size." He set up for a critic of plays, but was crushed by an epigram. When, on the death of his father and brother, he became heir to the estate, he undertook to shine as a huntsman; "but when I entered the field, it was soon discovered that I was not destined to the glories of the chase. I was afraid of the thorns in the thicket, and of dirt in the marsh; I shivered on the brink of a river while the sportsmen crossed it, and

trembled at the sight of a five-bar gate."

In the "Idler" we find a number of such upstarts held up for reproof: Tim Ranger (Nos. 62 and 64, June 23, and July 27, 1759), Sam Softly (No. 93, by T. Warton), of whom it is said, "Had Sam, as nature intended, contentedly continued in the calmer and less conspicuous pursuits of sugar-baking, he might have been a respectable and useful character. . . . He affects pleasures which he cannot enjoy, and is acquainted only with those subjects on which he has no right to talk, and which it is no merit to understand." In No. 95, Tim Wainscot, "a trader," consults the "Idler" about his son, "who is always impatient in the company of

his old friends, and seldom speaks till he is warmed with wine; he then entertains us with accounts that we do not desire to hear, of intrigues among lords and ladies, and quarrels between officers in the guards." In fact, however, his father has seen him in public places where "he sneaks in like a man that knows he is where he should not be; he is proud to catch the slightest salutation, and often claims it when it is not intended." In a word, he is "a fop, whom pride will not suffer to be a trader, and whom long habits in a shop forbid to be a gentleman."

Even here, however, we have not open and full-blown snobbishness, with the full intricacy that it has assumed in happier days; but rather

an abundance of proof of the swift material development in England in the last century. As Johnson said in the "Idler," No. 73, "In our time the poor are strongly tempted to assume the appearance of wealth, . . . for we are at full liberty to display riches by every mode of ostentation. We fill our houses with useless ornaments, only to show that we can buy them; we cover our coaches with gold, and employ artists in the discovery of new fashions of expense; and yet it cannot be found that riches produce happiness." In short, a plutocracy was growing up. But the position of the aristocracy was only threatened, not shaken: they found imitators, but not rivals; their status as "the great"

was yet firm. In the "Mirror," which, to be sure, appeared at Edinburgh, although much later, in 1780, we find this corroboratory statement: "It is strange, methinks, that the desire of depressing the humble, and overawing the modest, should be so common as it is among those on whom birth or station has conferred superiority." And in Letter XXXI. of Goldsmith's "Citizen of the World," 1760, there is a keen description of those who fill the uncertain place between parasites and snobs: "'You are still under a mistake,' replied my companion; 'for though this nobleman is a stranger to generosity; though he takes twenty opportunities in a day of letting his guests know how much

he despises them; though he is possessed neither of taste, wit, nor wisdom; though incapable of improving others by his conversation, and never known to enrich any by his bounty, — yet, for all this, his company is eagerly sought after: he is a lord, and that is as much as most people desire in a companion. Quality and title have such allurements, that hundreds are ready to give up all their own importance, to cringe, to flatter, to look little, and to pall every pleasure in constraint, merely to be among the great, though without the least hopes of improving their understanding, or sharing their generosity; they might be happy among their equals, but those are despised for company

where they are despised in turn. You saw what a crowd of humble cousins, card-ruined beaux, and captains on half-pay, were willing to make up this great man's retinue down to his country-seat. Not one of all these that could not lead a more comfortable life at home in their little lodging of three shillings a week, with their lukewarm dinner served up between two pewter plates from a cook-shop. Yet, poor devils, they are willing to undergo the impertinence and pride of their entertainer, merely to be thought to live among the great: they are willing to pass the summer in bondage, though conscious they are taken down only to approve his lordship's taste upon every occasion, to tag all

his stupid observations with a *Very true*, to praise his stable, and descant upon his claret and cookery.'"

But this coarse barter of food, drink, and shelter, for flattery and subserviency, is yet remote from the subtler development of personal indignity that was at this period making ready to burst upon the nineteenth century. Even the famous conversation of Miss Skeggs and Lady Blarney in the "Vicar of Wakefield," chapter xi., at which Mr. Burchell continually said "Fudge!" indicates merely the wide-spread curiosity about "anecdotes of lords, ladies, and knights of the garter," which the Vicar gratified by recording these fantastic speeches. Snobbishness was not yet fully formed: it

was in the same incomplete condition as democracy, traces of which abound in all the writings from which these quotations have been made; and it is important to understand how thoroughly the importance of "the great" was an object of veneration. Some of these quotations may appear to magnify the importance of the small; yet it is never to be forgotten, that there is no moment on which one can put his finger, and say, "Here is something absolutely new, something never thought of before, that appeared without preparation." No conscientious historian will begin the history of the American Revolution in 1775, or of the French in 1789: to understand either, it is

necessary to go back indefinitely, and to trace the many currents leading to those grand events from a very remote past. There is no one day in which a man becomes old, no one measurement which declares a growing boy tall. All the developments of literature in this century carry us back by curious ramifications to obscure, half-forgotten attempts of writers in the last. We say Wordsworth introduced the love of nature; but the most indifferent examination shows us the feeling growing up for many years, to find full expression in him and his contemporaries. Hence it is, because growth is gradual, that every thing which is called a novelty is always attacked as trite and untrue by ener-

getic conservatives. The future as well as the past is implicit in every thing that happens; and if we were to quote from every book written in the last two hundred years, it would be impossible to say, "Here is the first outburst of snobbishness," as it would be to find the first statement of democracy. Where can one find it more plainly set down than in Goldsmith's description of Beau Tibbs in his "Citizen of the World"? — "Mrs. Tibbs was for keeping the genteel walk of the garden, where she observed there was always the very best company: the widow, on the contrary, who came but once a season, was for securing a good standing-place to see the water-works, which, she as-

sured us, would begin in less than an hour at farthest. A dispute therefore began. . . . Mrs. Tibbs wondered how people could pretend to know the polite world who had received all their rudiments of breeding behind a counter." In the controversy that followed, the widow had the worst of it; and she was indiscreet enough to find the supper excellent, "but Mrs. Tibbs thought every thing detestable. 'Come, come, my dear,' cries the husband, by way of consolation, 'to be sure, we can't find such dressing here as we have at Lord Crump's or Lady Crimp's; but for Vauxhall dressing it is pretty good. It is not their victuals, indeed, I find fault with, but their wine, their wine,' cries he,

drinking off a glass, 'is most abominable.'"

The next paragraph is most important: it marks the dawn of a new era in the history of snobbishness; it is, in a way, the equivalent of Gray's admiration of mountain scenery early in the last century, or of Rousseau's "Contrat Social" in the history of politics. Its full importance is partly hidden, to be sure, under a cloud of exaggeration; but to the student of society it is yet rich in promise of what the nineteenth century was going to show in vast abundance. These are the words: "By this last contradiction the widow was fairly conquered in point of politeness. She perceived now that she had no pretensions in the world to taste; her

very senses were vulgar, since she had praised detestable custard, and smacked at wretched wine: she was therefore content to yield the victory, and for the rest of the night to listen and improve. It is true, she would now and then forget herself, and confess she was pleased; but they soon brought her back again to miserable refinement. She once praised the painting of the box in which we were sitting, but was soon convinced that such paltry pieces ought rather to excite horror than satisfaction; she ventured again to commend one of the singers, but Mrs. Tibbs soon let her know, in the style of a connoisseur, that the singer in question had neither ear, voice, nor judgment."

IV.

In a word, snobbishness was born. The mortification which the widow knew that evening at Vauxhall has crimsoned all our cheeks, as Mrs. Tibbs's airs of superiority have poisoned all society; and it is in this gross form of vulgar bragging, that one of the subtlest of social influences began its work. With advancing civilization it has acquired a perfection that gives it the appearance of something very different; but it is in all essentials the same, just as the "floating palaces," that people call steamboats in print, are mere developments of the crude tubs that

delighted their inventors. These exhibitions of vulgar insolence carry us back to the barbarities of an earlier time, just as they forebode the future; but their full growth depended on a general change of opinion concerning the inviolability of the aristocracy, which was one of the most serious problems that confronted the last century. The examination of this question began in a sufficiently remote way, and far outside of the persistent gentility of the second generation of essayists. Both they, and in a very considerable measure the novelists, had their roots in "The Spectator," and especially in Addison's contributions; but while the later writers of the essays catered more and more to the

tastes and interests of the cultivated classes, the novelists, on the other hand, kept closer to the life of the time. While gradually the essay developed into a series of separate doses of culture and refinement, the novel grew to be the most important expression of modern literature; and it is with Richardson that its great significance began. In his "Pamela," 1741, there is recounted the love of a man of wealth and position for a poor servant-girl, who resists his nefarious projects, and finally marries him. The very plot is subversive of the old ways of thinking; for the success of these facile loves had long been a conventional decoration of literature, as a part of the privileges of the aristocracy, and to

its members had belonged hitherto the privilege of holding the place of hero and heroine. In the comedies, for example, ordinary citizens appeared only as the legitimate prey of the nobility, and kings and heroes were alone deemed worthy of being celebrated in tragedy. Hence Richardson's modification of the work of literature was a vast one; and it was, too, in strict accordance with the great political changes of the period, which gave power to the *bourgeoisie*. And it is not in the general plan alone that the new spirit is evident. Pamela reflects on the likeness of the skull of a king to that of a pauper, and that prince and beggar stand together in the Day of Judgment. When she hears

that her master is to be made a peer, she says it would be better for him to be made a good man. It was, however, rather with a moral than with a political aim that these remarks were made, and the whole intention of the novel was distinctly didactic: it thus fell into line with the general movement of the age towards instruction in regard to rules of life. But its strenuous inculcation of personal dignity was already a lesson in democracy, and the revolutionary tendency of the book did not escape comment. The German writer Lenz, in his "Soldaten," lets a countess say to the humble-born Marie, "Your only fault was that you did not know the world; that you were ignorant of the distinction

between different classes of society; that you had read 'Pamela,' the most dangerous book that a person in your rank can read." The introduction of characters from what is called common life was in itself a shock to those who fancied that literature properly had to do only with people of education and refinement. Marivaux, who in France preceded Richardson in England in the delineation of humbler persons, was attacked with considerable severity for this boldness. Even D'Alembert, whose own mother had abandoned him in infancy, and who owed his life to the charity of a glazier's wife who brought him up, objected to Marivaux's innovations: he said, "The author has not disdained to paint even the stu-

pidity of the populace, its aimless curiosity, its coarse charity, its clumsy and offensive kindness, its compassionate hardness:" yet in these words he did but repeat the commonplaces of most men of letters, who held that the *bourgeoisie* might be admitted into comedy as the playthings or victims of the aristocracy, and that the only literary use to be made of the people was as a sort of lifeless chorus to serve as a foil for the real characters.

Yet, while the novel was thus indirectly sapping the aristocratic exclusiveness of the current literary methods by portraying the qualities of a class whose possession of human characteristics was scarcely acknowledged, the security of people

of rank was not openly threatened; their privileges were scarcely touched. They yet remained the "great," and the rest of the world continued to adore and respect them almost without a murmur.

V.

NEVERTHELESS, during the course of the eighteenth century, in addition to the growing power of the citizens, or *bourgeoisie*, and the rapid increase of wealth which brought into existence a large number of rivals to the aristocracy, a new spirit was making itself felt in the religious excitement that was tending to break up the petrified ecclesiasticism then prevailing in England. In this way was undermined one of the strongest buttresses of an artificial society, and at the same time the aristocracy was directly attacked by the suggestion that there was in fact an essen-

tial equality between the souls of prince and peasant, — or rather, as the principle was commonly applied, between the soul of a prince and that of a poor citizen, for there still existed a sort of property qualification for entrance into heaven, as well as for admission to the enjoyment of political privileges. In literature this spirit showed itself in the disposition to contemplate the democratic recklessness of death, before which human distinctions are powerless, as in Blair's "Grave," in which "proud royalty" is told, —

"Mute must thou bear the strife of little tongues,
And coward insults of the base-born crowd."

Even more convincing instances may be garnered from Young's "Night Thoughts," which abound with statements of this undeniable truth. Thus, Night Sixth: —

"Eternity depending all achieves;
Sets earth at distance; casts her into shades;
Blends her distinctions; abrogates her powers;
The low, the lofty, joyous, and severe,
Fortune's dread frowns and fascinating smiles,
Make one promiscuous and neglected heap."

And a few lines earlier, worldly success is thus denounced: —

"What is station high?
'Tis a proud mendicant: it boasts and begs;
It begs an alm of homage from the throng,

And oft the throng denies it charity.
Monarchs and ministers are awful names!
Whoever wear them challenge our devoir.
Religion, public order, both exact
External homage and a supple knee,
To beings pompously set up, to serve
The meanest slave: all more is Merit's due,
Her sacred and inviolable right;
Nor ever paid the monarch, but the man.
Our hearts ne'er bow but to superior worth;
Nor ever fail of their allegiance there.
Fools, indeed, drop the man in their account,
And vote the mantle into majesty.
Let the small savage boast his silver fur,
His royal robe unborrowed and unbought,
His own, descending fairly from his sires.
Shall man be proud to wear his livery,
And souls in ermine scorn a soul without?
Can place or lessen us, or aggrandize?
Pygmies are pygmies still, though perched on Alps."

A similar sentiment is expressed in Blair's "Grave:" —

> "Under ground
> Precedency's a jest; vassal and lord,
> Grossly familiar, side by side consume."

VI.

While the dangerous proximity of these utterances to platitudes insures for them, at all times, formal assent, their continual enforcement in the romantic literature of the last century was of the nature of a novelty, and one that tended to limit the extreme authority of an aristocracy, very much as the strict debit-and-credit account of evil and good conduct, that is the core of Buddhism, disturbed the serenity of the Brahman caste system. But while these statements shared the truth of platitudes, they doubtless, like these, at all times were without very active

influence on men's actions. A far more serious movement was that growing up in France, which, after the death of Pope, had taken the lead in intellectual matters. Rousseau, whose "Nouvelle Héloïse" was to a great extent inspired by Richardson's novels, had made a direct attack on the aristocracy in that novel; and in his other writings he was laying the foundations of the great Revolution. Naturally, his work was arousing attention in certain quarters of England; men who were alive to the importance of studying contemporary thought were reading him; one is safe in looking for a statement of conservatism in the life of Dr. Johnson, and that excellent man gave his

opinion on what were yet theoretical questions, in very clear terms. It was July 20, 1763, that there took place a very important conversation on the French writer, which Boswell has recorded at some length. Rousseau's treatise on the inequality of mankind was at this time, he tells us, a very fashionable topic. This may have been the celebrated "Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité," which appeared in 1754, or possibly the "Contrat Social," which came out in 1762, — the decision is difficult, and for our present purpose unimportant: at any rate, in both, Rousseau was making his tremendous attack on the artificiality of society, which inspired one of the company, Mr. Dempster, to say "that the

advantages of fortune and rank were nothing to a wise man, who ought to value only merit," and "to maintain that intrinsic merit, *ought* to make the only distinction amongst mankind." To this last remark Johnson made answer as follows: "Why, sir, mankind have found that this cannot be. How shall we determine the proportion of intrinsic merit? Were that to be the only distinction amongst mankind, we should soon quarrel about the degrees of it. Were all distinctions abolished, the strongest would not long acquiesce, but would endeavor to obtain a superiority by their bodily strength. But, sir, as subordination is very necessary for society, and contentions for superiority very

dangerous, mankind, that is to say, all civilized nations, have settled it upon a plain, invariable principle. A man is born to hereditary rank; or, his being appointed to certain offices gives him a certain rank. Subordination tends greatly to human happiness. Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure." And the next day, when alone with Boswell, he returned to the same subject: "Sir, I would no more deprive a nobleman of his respect than of his money. I consider myself as acting a part in the great system of society, and I do to others as I would have them do to me." Then he went on to narrate his rebuff of Mrs. Macaulay, "a great

republican," who talked democracy to him until he proposed that she should invite the footman to sit down at table with them. "She has never liked me since. Sir, your levellers wish to level *down* as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling *up* to themselves." He blamed an author, possibly Goldsmith, for not showing deference to the great, and then said, "Sir, there would be a perpetual struggle for precedence, were there no fixed, invariable rules for the distinction of rank, which creates no jealousy, as it is allowed to be accidental." April 11, 1778, "he burst forth, 'Subordination is sadly broken down in this age. No man now has the same authority which his father had, — except a

gaoler,'" etc. In a few words he described the decay of feudalism: "No man depends upon the lord of a manor, when he can send to another country and fetch provisions. The shoeblack at the entry of my court does not depend on me. I can deprive him but of a penny a day, which he hopes some one else will bring him; and that penny I must carry to another shoeblack, so the trade suffers nothing. . . . But, besides, there is a general relaxation of reverence."

VII.

In short, as all these quotations show, and as Dr. Johnson piteously laments, the old spirit of feudalism was giving way before modern thought and experience, and the fixity of the social system was seriously threatened. That the impending danger should have alarmed conservatives, is only natural; for it seemed to them that henceforth respect was to be given to none but successful money-makers, who probably would be ignorant and vulgar. Subordination, when generally understood and accepted, had secured, at least, social tranquillity, and had

saved men from restlessness and uncertainty about their position. Whatever it was in theory, in practice this fixity had established a contentedness which is not always known when the struggle for precedence is hot. Dr. Johnson's own life illustrates the ease of living, the indifference to the social standing of his company, which should be a philosopher's ideal. He was at home everywhere, — with lords and ladies, as on his tour to the Hebrides, and, for that matter, in London, and at the humbler tables of booksellers and actors. There was all the freedom of actual democracy when it was clearly understood that the rights of the nobility were not brought into question by their ac-

cessibility. The same condition existed in France, and, indeed, over a good part of the Continent; as will be attested by Diderot's visit to the court of Catherine, who complained only that he used to beat her legs black and blue, so violently did he gesticulate while talking. No one felt or expressed any surprise at this commingling of great and humble-born, nor was there pride on one side to be met by humiliation on the other: the difference of rank was a fact, not a source of vanity or uneasiness, and so accepted, as a subaltern acknowledges the superiority of his colonel without any sensation of personal degradation. So long as subordination existed as an established condition of society, the

rigidity of caste kept people from thinking about their precise status or that of their company, and from the endeavor to improve it by pretentiousness; the moment it was questioned, both sides became uneasy, one with envy, the other with apprehension, and the delicious repose was gone.

We have seen this repose existing only when there was a fair exchange between, on the one hand, grand company, polished and refined, and on the other, distinct intellectual power. There was also the coarser interchange of aristocratic society and the flattery of parasites, but here the possibility of confusion was even smaller. The humiliation and truckling were cash payment for

degrading condescension. Social struggle hardly existed in either case: those who held a lofty position were as secure in the enjoyment of their exclusive rights as is now a king. It is probable that at the present day kings know the sweets of flattery, and find people ready to abase themselves before them; but no one pretends to be a king. All the struggle in the world after the privileges of royalty will fail to impose upon any one; and the monarch alone enjoys a security that once extended over all equally artificial social institutions, and survives, in a modified form, in the privileges of a high officer in an army or of one holding a lofty position in the Church, — the two most prominent

relics of feudalism now existing. Indeed, the analogy is well worth a moment's attention; for what we see in officers and priests, of high or low degree, once existed throughout society. Just as their position may be determined by their uniform or insignia, so was at one time all society uniformed; not, of course, by accidental coincidence, — if there be such a thing, — but on account of the general existence of the same reasons that direct and control the uniforming of soldiers. And further, as has been said above, the distinctions of social rank were once equally rigid and equally accepted.

VIII.

So far, then, have we come, that we may observe the changes infringing upon the comparative simplicity of aristocratic superiority as felt and acknowledged in the eighteenth century. New wealth, religious fervor, the democracy of the novel, were all, in their own way, destroying the old feudal spirit, — slowly, to be sure, for the vast structure, like one of its old castles, is not overthrown in a day, but none the less persistently. We have seen luxury in unaccustomed hands, becoming a rival power to old family and venerable title; and in Goldsmith's account

of the fateful evening at Vauxhall we have detected the beginning of the new spirit which in future ages will perhaps be as much of a puzzle to students of the present day, as is to us now the intensity of the Greek feeling about burial. The obscurity of the personages whom Goldsmith has ridiculed should not blind us to the importance of their words; with them the lines were less firmly drawn than they are between bishops and archbishops, and could be easily overstepped by pretentiousness and craft. The great of the earth were far securer; but their day was coming, and the story of its approach is not wholly without interest. All these symptoms of change were but the premonitory mutterings of the storm

that broke forth in the French Revolution, in that uprising against an aristocracy. It is obvious, that, if this had been thoroughly successful, men's relations to the aristocracy would have been confined to disposing of their decapitated bodies, and dividing such part of their possessions as escaped destruction by fire; but, far from this, one immediate upshot of the whole matter was a violent reaction against what was called the frenzy of fanatics. At its first outbreak, a large party in England hailed with rapture what seemed to be the dawn of a new day.

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven! O
times!
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways

Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!
When Reason seemed the most to assert
her rights,"

as Wordsworth wrote. But soon this enthusiasm was succeeded by very different feelings; and those who had been loudest in welcoming the Revolution became earnest advocates of authority, like Wordsworth and Southey, while Coleridge's voice was lost to poetry.

The pendulum swung far in the opposite direction; and the reaction, under the influence of terror and horror, was intense. It made itself manifest in the downfall of the old theory of cosmopolitanism, before the appearance of an ardent patriotism which animated English, Germans,

and Russians against a common foe. Part of this spirit showed itself most clearly in the new-born reverence for every thing that belonged to antiquity. Old customs, old emotions, old rules, came into new life as an efficient protection against the destructiveness of modern ideas; and since reason had brought the world to such a pass, men turned instinctively to enthusiasm as a surer guide. This emotional interest in antiquity is the very core of many of Scott's novels, and of much of the poetry of the time. In his stories, the majesty of kings and queens, and of lords and ladies, is recounted with wonderful charm. The common people were all distinguished by reverence, cheerfulness, and dignified subordination;

their good qualities are set in a most attractive light; their fidelity and loyalty are shown to be infinitely more valuable than the promptings of misleading reason that had excited discontent, and brought society to the edge of a terrible abyss. The reverence that is felt for the great is, in his novels, the birthright of their exalted position, the proper equivalent of the benignant splendor of their character. While the humbler personages are faithful, honest, affectionate, and, above all, loyal, the knights of chivalry are especially distinguished by generosity. The possibility of their being overbearing is overlooked as much as is that of servility among their inferiors: each was presented in the most pictur-

esque light, the result being that the Middle Ages were redeemed from the contempt with which they had been regarded for many centuries. What if they had been a period full of ignorance, credulity, superstition, and brutality; all that was lost sight of, in comparison with the simplicity and beauty of life that had existed in that once-despised time, when men had felt nobly, and were not misled by reason. The change went further: the amiable figure of Scott's Antiquary was a rehabilitation of a class of men who had been the common prey of satirists throughout the eighteenth century, from the "Tatler," (No. 216), to the "Mirror," (No. 17); and the toying with astrology in "Guy Mannering" was an-

other revival of forgotten interests. These were but trifles, however, by the side of the knights, and men-at-arms, the crusaders, pages, high-born maidens, the castle-walls, dungeon-keeps, portcullises, abbeys, and all the enormous mass of characters and mediæval scenery that dazzled an astonished world. The reaction was not confined to literature: it extended to domestic architecture on the one hand, and to religion on the other Gothic buildings seemed once more beautiful; the peaked roof was imitated for no such trivial reason as a possible superior means of keeping out the rain, or the greater commodiousness of the rooms beneath it; small panes of glass lent to these rooms a mysterious gloom;

the old dress of the Scotch Highlanders was revived, under the influence of the same enthusiasm that at this day inspires Prince Bismarck to encourage the printing of German books in the most crabbed exaggeration of the monkish perversion of Latin letters. The Catholic reaction on the Continent, and the flowering of the High Church in England, are corresponding symptoms of the return to the principles of the Middle Ages.

The whole period was set in a new light, was seen through eyes wet with emotion, and the vividness of the impression more than atoned for the lack of historical accuracy. Had the people who lived in the Middle Ages come to life again early in this

century, they would have found it hard to understand the theories according to which they would have been expected to live. They would have been like actors who should try to grow fat on the Barmecide feasts of a stage-play. Yet the fervor with which these additions to men's interests were accumulated, contributed enormously to the intellectual and artistic wealth of the world, just as the activity of gold and diamond miners brings civilization in its train. Here, however, we have but a small part of its influence to discuss, and that is the altered views of the functions and position of the aristocracy. Democracy had done its worst, and, to all appearance, failed; and in this generous representation of the

picturesqueness of life, there was enforced a new lesson of what it was that should really animate society. The old nobility was shown to be connected with all that made life precious: the king was like a star that dwelt apart in a region of lofty grandeur; and the proper state of the rest of the world, towards these majestic creatures, was one of awe and the deepest reverence. This, it was maintained, was the condition of things when the world was truly happy, — before, as Rousseau said, man had been depraved by thought; and it was every one's duty to assume as much of this reverential spirit as possible. To argue about these matters, was to indulge in pernicious sophistry: we should rather

feel how great life is; what stores of instruction there are in sheer belief; how well the magnificent pageantry of the setting betokens the rich spiritual nutriment to be derived from accepting without question all the dignity and beauty of a forgotten time, while poor shivering reason left man stript of all that made life beautiful, and the prey of every passion. Man was to learn to adore the abundant beauty of life; and what was more beautiful than the grace of a chosen aristocracy, endowed with an uncommon nature, and surrounded with every sign of power and splendor? For fact and reason, there was substituted what was really a form of idolatry. Just as the savage will take a piece of

wood, hew it into something bearing a remote resemblance to human shape, sharpen its claws and awful teeth, polish its terrible eyes, and then, after setting it in a secure corner, will fall on his knees before it, and worship it; so does his more or less tamed brother endow with awful grandeur a creature who by birth or merit has won success, and proceed to humiliate himself before this representative of power. This must not, however, be too readily called mere love of grovelling. Under the protecting wing of romanticism, with its ardent inculcation of patriotism, loyalty, and reverence, the disposition to find a neglected or despised greatness flourished triumphantly; and some of the spirit

that held together the lines at Waterloo lent to those who staid at home a comparative toleration of the faults of George IV., a readiness to look at the errors of a king as things pardonable in one not of common clay; and part of the divinity that hedged him in his infamy extended its protecting power over the nobility. Nor was its virtue confined to the court circle: the new hero of fiction shone only by his superiority to the rest of the world. As we shall see, the history of the romantic novel is at bottom an account of the adoration of a literary aristocracy, the title to which was the possession of something above mere human qualities.

IX.

It must be understood that this condition of things was not an accidental result of a number of curious coincidences, but that they all, virtues and faults together, owed their origin, in politics, warfare, religion, architecture, dress-reform, and literature, to a few general principles then triumphant; prominent among these being a love of mystery, of the miraculous. This at one moment admitted ghosts into fiction, making them appear quite reputable members of society; while, on the other hand, the aristocracy assumed an air of mystery which had once

belonged only to ghosts. And it is curious to notice that the visitants from the shades always belonged to old families, not only in this world but in the other, as if a ghost of less than three hundred years were but a parvenu, unfit to shine in fiction. This disposition to magnify the merit of the great was not, then, a simple manifestation of men's respect for conspicuous merit, but rather a readiness to give to it a somewhat unearthly splendor, to find in every thing that pleased or impressed men a quality which was affirmed to be undefinable, and was at once defined as genius when ability was spoken of, or as a superhuman charm when men's relations were under discussion. All of these things are quali-

ties that belonged to romanticism; and in this new-born enthusiasm for the aristocracy we may see the romantic movement in society, and may trace its progress there as clearly as we may see it in any of its other demonstrations. One groundwork of snobbishness was thus laid in the renewed vigor of the imagination. Men magnified the importance of the great, and then fell down and worshipped them. This change made itself manifest in a thousand different ways, — in pomp and splendor of appearance, in formality of manners and an exaltation of etiquette; distinctions that had been practically ignored were revived, and rendered more impressive. Instances abound; as, for example,

when we compare the almost rustic simplicity of the life of George III. at Windsor with the paraphernalia of majesty wherewith George IV. enwrapped himself. In the "Passages from the Life of Charles Knight," speaking of the early years of the nineteenth century, it is stated (p. 48): "The distinction between the trading and the professional classes was not so nicely preserved as it is now. Respectability was the quality more aimed at by the attorney and doctor than what we call gentility; and respectability did not mean the pretension of keeping a gig or a footman, — display for the world, and meanness for the household." And (p. 72) he mentions the Jubilee Ball in 1809, and speaks of some "gen-

teel exclusives who attempted to separate the attorneys' wives and daughters from the grocers' wives and daughters by stretching a silken rope across the room, thus forming two sets." This silken rope, with its magical power, was but the outward and visible sign of countless social divisions that rested on very subtle distinctions.

One important element was the possession of wealth which gave men a key that opened all gates. Those who had acquired it, naturally strove to obtain a position among the greatest, to enter the charmed circle ; and those who succeeded were very careful to comply with that first law of etiquette, which bade them shut the door behind them. They at once

became more orthodox than the pope, and used their weapon to make their own position firm and inaccessible. Instead of opposing or rivalling the aristocracy, they began by strengthening it in every way in their power; they became its allies, and flattered it by the most scrupulously careful imitation. Those who could not indulge in a chariot and six, with outriders, were fain to follow in the dust of their betters in the humble gig, once the unmistakable token of gentility, and to assume such fragmentary elegance as lay within their power; the greater or less brilliancy of the display became the sole test of worth. Yet the aroma clung to even a dim display, if this were made in the

proper spirit, just as even a very small footstool from the hold of the "Mayflower" lends dignity to a very large house: the only essential thing was the recognition that the king was the fountain of honor, and an aristocracy the sole deposit of human dignity.

X.

Snobbishness, then, represents, not subordination, for that is extinct when it is possible for men to rise by their own exertions, but the willingness to pay respect to what is acknowledged to be an artificial system that is maintained for social convenience. The formality that the snob worships is the defence of those who are in, the shibboleth which is meant to appall the outsiders; and compliance with its rules is the sure path to worldly success. It appeared, then, when the old bars began to give way, when aristocratic exclusiveness was broken,

and when a new force, that of the plutocracy, came to a knowledge of its power. These rich men began to share an authority that previously had belonged exclusively to the aristocracy, to which they levelled themselves up; and when Thackeray said that the name began to be applied to certain persons about the year 1815, the remark conveyed this solemn truth, that the snobs made their appearance in the modern world at the time when the old conditions had been shaken, and wealth was aping them.

That the new allies should have combined with the nobility, is perfectly simple: they imitated what was most impressive in the new region that they had reached, and

forswore all their old belongings, and outdid their old rivals in worshipping their idols. The aristocracy being endowed with somewhat magical virtues, it at once became desirable to live near it, to share its refinements and susceptibilities, to know its loves and hates; and Thackeray's "Book of Snobs" gives us a succession of pictures that will portray this feeling. Those who were not born in the purple, at any rate, had a strong taste for magenta; and the hue permeated all society, inspiring it with the yearning to give evidence of at least some drops of the aniline dye. Such efforts would have been powerless when the upward step was impossible, when no one could be deceived by even

the cleverest imitation: a man is only a hypocrite when something is to be gained by it; for the rest of the time, he is either indifferent or a bully; and if hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue, we may regard snobbishness, on its social side, as the homage that a plutocracy pays to an aristocracy.

It was, then, at about the period of the Bourbon restoration, that this quality may be said to have found recognition, to have become part of the modern social system. The aristocracy had been imperilled, its sanctity had been threatened; but it had also acquired a new lease of actual power in the political settlement of a long turmoil, and it was adorned with all the melodramatic grandeur

of its mediæval belongings. The plutocrats contributed of their wealth to make it impressive and stately. The moment a man was admitted into the circle, he showed all a convert's enthusiasm for conservatism. Let the reader recall Wordsworth's sonnets about the Church of England, and his Thanksgiving Odes, and he will find abundant instances of the altered thought. Thus: —

"But if the valiant of the land
In reverential modesty, demand
That all observance, due to them, be paid
Where their severe progenitors are laid;
Kings, warriors, high-souled poets, saint-like sages,
England's illustrious sons of long, long ages;
Be it not unordained that solemn rites
Within the circuit of those golden walls,
Shall be performed at pregnant intervals;

Commemoration holy, that unites
The living generation with the dead;
By the deep soul-moving sense
Of religious eloquence, —
By visual pomp, and by the tie
Of sweet and threatening harmony;
Soft notes, awful as the omen
Of destructive tempests coming,
And escaping from that sadness
Into elevated gladness;
While the white-robed choir attendant,
Under mouldering banners pendent," etc.

Here we have, as we shall find it elsewhere, the wide-spread spirit of mediævalism triumphant, as we see conservatism in Southey's bitter denunciations of Byron. Even in the most violent reaction against the supremacy of the aristocracy, we find traces of the authority that belonged to it through its possession

of all the insignia of power; just as now the first thing that anarchists do when they meet together to devise plans for destroying every form of government, is to elect officers who shall rule them with absolute despotism. The very writers who were most eager in their condemnation of the existing condition of things were prone to find the best solution in the advocacy of a wise and honorable aristocracy, who should stand far above the raw, vulgar democracy. Thus Landor and Byron, while they detest kings on the one hand, hate the people quite as much, and reserve all their praises for a refined, exalted oligarchy of chosen spirits, who shall restore order and peace. In these preferences we may

perhaps see traces of the same feeling that is more prominent in art and letters. Heretofore, for example, the sole heroes of history and tragedy had been kings or very exalted personages; but with the end of the eighteenth century the humble-born became objects of interest, but with this extremely important qualification, that they too possessed exceptional traits that took the place of the former loftiness of birth, and gave these new characters equal weight and singularity. Even if their birth was low, they yet made this misfortune good by emotions that distinguished them from the aristocrats; and they were any thing but humdrum people. The old ideas had thus to be worn out, like all of

one's inheritance from one's ancestors: like old chairs and tables which it is impossible for the most heartless to cut up for firewood, they must linger until they crumble in new surroundings.

XI.

The whole mass of the literature of romanticism is full of illustrations of this dilution of the literary value of the aristocracy by the division of its essential grandeur among other people. We may see proofs in Victor Hugo's virtuous villains and innocent criminals, as well as in the same paradoxical characters as they appear under tamer conditions, in Bulwer's novels, and in the various transformations of the hero from superhuman viciousness to the possession of irresistible personal beauty, and back again to an even more fascinating ugliness of appear-

ance and crabbedness of disposition: throughout, one rule prevails, — that it is the exceptional being who alone represents his kind. The hero no longer wears a crown of gold and jewels, but he at least would have a good right to one if kings were chosen by ballot, and novel-readers were electors; and, as it is, he is adorned with rare and radiant qualities that separate him from the ordinary mass. In other words, the exaggerated, inflated hero is in good part the expression of the new importance of the individual, as compared with the abstract, conventional, typical being who was the main object of study in the classical period of modern literature; and he was interesting only by his generous

possession of exceptional excellence, whereby he was distinguished from the common rabble. The hero of poetry and fiction was very nearly the equivalent of the social hero of the time, who was endowed with a mysterious quality, an indescribable grandeur that bore a close likeness to the fascination of his half-brother, the literary creation.

All the romantic poets who belong to the beginning of the nineteenth century furnish numerous instances of this tendency, which manifested itself in discovering an unknown truth and beauty throughout the world. Weeds, trees, birds, mountains, valleys, were seen with new eyes; and human beings of all ages and conditions were regarded with

generous sympathy. It was at this time that children were admitted into literature as individual characters; and as for beggars, shepherds, peasants, sailors, their day began. As what had been painted or enamelled foliage began to be subdivided with more accurate botanical knowledge, and feathered birds to be accurately distinguished instead of jumbled together as they are in the mind of the dwellers in cities; so the people themselves had their separate characteristics brought out with loving care, and every variety of the social scale was endowed with an unsuspected significance. Wordsworth's daisies, daffodils, primroses, snowdrops, celandines, eglantine, oaks, brooms, thorns, and yews; his

sparrows, linnets, cuckoos, skylarks, nightingales, redbreasts, butterflies, kittens, lambs, hares, dogs, and asses, — were all seen and loved with the same novel enthusiasm and affection as the Cumberland Beggar, the Blind Highland Boy, the Idiot Boy, the Old Huntsman, Simon Lee, William, Peter Bell, the Idle Shepherd Boys, and the whole mass of vagrants, gypsies, paupers, wanderers, etc., with whose beauty and dignity he enriched the world. In all these cases, the aim of the poet was to show with what profit even these apparently despicable people and things might be regarded by those who freed their minds from current prejudices; and the exaltation was not confined to them alone. Words-

worth was at times a fellow-worker with Scott in singing the glory of the past and the splendor of mediæval pageantry. He at least knew some of its charm; and he lent a part of the light that never was on sea or land to its presentation, and a light that certainly never shone in the eighteenth century, when the Middle Ages were looked upon with aversion, and all their most curious qualities were wholly or nearly unknown. This is certainly not Wordsworth's most characteristic work; for his path lay much more among the lowly, as they are sometimes called, than among their antipodes. Yet that even he could be affected by the popular additional interest in the new beauty of the aristocracy is a

most convincing sign of its importance; and not to speak of his "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," and "The Horn of Egremont Castle," his "White Doe of Rylstone" bears no close resemblance to the outcasts of the animal kingdom that he had carefully collected. Indeed, the heroine of the poem, from which it gets its name, is a genuine aristocrat among beasts: —

"Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,
Comes gliding in serene and slow,
Soft and silent as a dream,
A solitary doe!
White she is as lily of June,
And beauteous as the silver moon
When out of sight the clouds are driven,
And she is left alone in heaven;
Or like a ship some gentle day
In sunshine sailing far away,

A glittering ship, that hath the plain
Of ocean for her own domain."

The doe steps down from a piece of tapestry into the poem; and it is interesting to compare it with the hare that was

"Running races in her mirth;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist; which, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she
doth run."

The only resemblance is, that they were both quadrupeds. The hare is alive, the doe is a bit of neat embroidery with a fantastic value; and the same difference is to be seen in the treatment of the nobility, who were endowed with a similar magic charm. It became impossible to look at them as simple human beings.

Even in this poem we find a man of seventy years blessed with

"Magnific limbs of withered state,
A face to fear and venerate,
Eyes dark and strong; and on his head
Rich locks of silver hair thick spread
Which a brown morion half concealed," etc.

And this venerable person steps down from the same tapestry as the doe. Both are creatures of fairy-land, and belong to the Middle Ages as they are in romance, when men were taller than their degenerate descendants, had great power of annihilating by frowns, and were good and true, lacked every human quality, and were especially distinguished for the possession of this newly invented aristocratic superiority to the rest of the world.

It was not in books alone that this ineffable charm existed: it belonged to life, as well as to novels and poems; and any one who was taught to thrill over the descriptions of brave knights and fair dames naturally knew somewhat similar raptures over their descendants, who had at least the advantage of a longer family history. We may see the different social ambition in Sir Walter Scott's life-long desire to found a family, and to establish himself among the aristocracy. We detect no such ambition in the eighteenth century. All that was then sought was ease and congenial society, and the doors of the great were open to any one who presented credentials of wit and ability; but with the ro-

mantic superiority of the aristocracy, equality threatened to disappear, and the only key was the assertion or pretence of social grandeur.

Again, Scott's horror when it was proposed to place for a moment the old Scotch crown on a young lady's head, and his delight over the possession of the wine-glass from which George IV. had drunk, — delight of brief duration, it will be remembered, for he sat down on it and crushed it to atoms a few hours afterwards, — indicate an intensity of feeling which the eighteenth century had not known. Crabbe, for example, was indifferent to what gave Scott such pleasure; Lockhart "went with him both to the castle and Queen Mary's apartment in Holy-

rood House, but he did not appear to care much about either." Nor was it in the eighteenth century that writers of distinction discussed in print what their conduct should be if a nobleman were to deign to speak to them, as Anthony Trollope did in his Life of Thackeray, written for the English Men of Letters Series. It is hard to conceive of Fielding, or Smollett, or, indeed, of any one of their contemporaries, regarding this question as one of any importance to himself or to the public. Even the worst that Dr. Johnson could say of Swift, for whom he felt no great love, was this: "Much has been said of the equality and independence which he preserved in his conversation with the ministers;

of the frankness of his remonstrances and the familiarity of his friendship. In accounts of this kind, a few single incidents are set against the general tenor of behavior. No man, however, can pay a more servile tribute to the great than by suffering his liberty in their presence to aggrandize him in his own esteem. Between different ranks of the community, there is necessarily some distance; he who is called by his superior to pass the interval may properly accept the invitation: but petulance and obtrusion are rarely produced by magnanimity, nor have often any nobler cause than the pride of importance and the malice of inferiority. He who knows himself necessary may set, while that necessity lasts,

a high value upon himself; as, in a lower condition, a servant eminently skilful may be saucy, but he is saucy only because he is servile." These statements and their implications certainly do not err on the side of flattery; but even here it is rather the arrogance of conscious power than the self-humiliation of the snob that inspires the stern moralist's malevolence; and possibly, if he had lived a century later, Johnson might have found something in the world that would have seemed more offensive than Swift's self-importance.

Later in the century we find the nobility still regarded as human beings: in Miss Burney's "Evelina," Lord Neville's advantages over the Branghtons are very clear, but there

is nothing mysterious about them. He is not wrapped up in a cloud of majesty; he is a simple creature, good-mannered, kind-hearted, and only imposing by his familiarity with the customs of good society. He is a mere boy beside the full-blown aristocrat of this century. Contemplate for a moment the figure that he would cut in the presence of Childe Harold, for example: how pallid his simplicity would appear in contrast with that noble hero's storm-tossed, vivid nature. There would be all the difference between a man of the world, and the best boy at a dancing-school; and a large part of this difference would be the newly devised glory that belonged to aristocrats, that made them special objects of

deep and reverential interest, and endowed them with natures apparently far more complicated and mysterious than those of ordinary beings.

This disposition to exalt every object of reverence went far: it made moonlight mysterious, mountains impressive, religion profound. Part of the new vision of solemnity fills Beethoven's magnificent symphonies; and throughout ther omantic poetry of the early part of the nineteenth century we find abundant proof that men had discovered secrets about the world, and its deep meaning, that had been but dimly guessed before that time. One part of this vast amplification of the general significance of things was the majesty that appeared to inhere to the aristocracy.

Its members belonged, in theory at least, to a remote past, and antiquity had acquired a new value; part of the charm which had suddenly flowered over old ruins and other memorials of feudalism, spread over them and their titles. We know what the romantic movement was in music, art, literature: in religion it appeared in the new fervor of the Church of Rome that appeared in Catholic countries, and in the revived mediævalism of the High-Church principles and practice in England; in medicine, homœopathy was a reaction in favor of a semi-miraculous theory of therapeutics; here we have the sudden outbreak of the awfulness of social distinctions, not as mere laws, but as solemn tokens of

deep distinctions. The new emotions about the greatness of the aristocracy differed as much from the old feudalism in which it came into existence, as the modern awe at the contemplation of ruined castles differs from the emotions of their baronial owners when their dwellings began to fall to pieces about their ears. What had once been a mere rule of life was seen through a poetic or semi-poetic haze; and while in certain respects this new way of looking at the world was one of the most fruitful that has ever been known, it is obvious that there is no one principle that can be universally applied without producing confusion. And if snobbishness attracts the attention of the moralist, he should at

least remember that the vice is well connected, that it belongs to a family that has many admirable members, to say nothing of the fact that it generally makes its appearance in people who think a great deal about respectability.

XII.

Since this general discussion may be too vague to carry conviction, it is possibly worth while to look over some small part of the bulky testimony that is contained in the fiction of the period under discussion; for there, if anywhere, we shall be able to discern the "form and pressure" of the age. Especially is this true of the novels of Jane Austen, whose keen eye missed none of the social complications that unrolled or tried to hide themselves in the little circle in which she lived. Her testimony carries weight about any thing which she set down; and if she omitted

any social phenomenon that would naturally find its place in her chronicle, we have some warrant for inferring its non-existence. In only two of her books — "Emma," and "Pride and Prejudice" — does snobbishness appear. In the first of these it is portrayed almost sketchily in the character and conversation of Mrs. Elton, who was, it will be remembered, a Miss Hawkins, "the youngest of the two daughters of a Bristol — merchant, of course, he must be called; but as the whole of the profits of his mercantile life appeared so very moderate, it was not unfair to guess the dignity of his line of trade had been very moderate also. Part of every winter she had been used to spend in Bath; but Bristol was her

home, the very heart of Bristol; for though the father and mother had died some years ago, an uncle remained — in the law line: nothing more distinctly honorable was hazarded of him than that he was in the law line; and with him the daughter had lived. Emma guessed him to be the drudge of some attorney, and too stupid to rise. And all the grandeur of the connection seemed dependent on the eldest sister, who was *very well married*, to a gentleman in a *great way*, near Bristol, who kept two carriages! That was the wind-up of the history; that was the glory of Miss Hawkins."

And her conversation brings out all the qualities here indicated. She comes to call on Emma at Hartfield.

"The very first subject, after being seated, was Maple Grove, 'my brother, Mr. Suckling's seat,' — a comparison of Hartfield to Maple Grove. The grounds of Hartfield were small, but neat and pretty, and the house was modern and well-built. Mrs. Elton seemed most favorably impressed by the size of the room, the entrance, and all that she could see or imagine. 'Very like Maple Grove, indeed! She was quite struck by the likeness! That room was the very shape and size of the morning-room at Maple Grove; her sister's favorite room.' Mr. Elton was appealed to. 'Was it not astonishingly like? She could really almost fancy herself at Maple Grove.

"'And the staircase. — You know,

as I came in, I observed how very like the staircase was; placed exactly in the same part of the house. I really could not help exclaiming! I assure you, Miss Woodhouse, it is very delightful to be reminded of a place I am so extremely partial to as Maple Grove. I have spent so many happy months there! (with a little sigh of sentiment.) A charming place, undoubtedly. Everybody who sees it is struck by its beauty; but to me it has been quite a home. . . . So extremely like Maple Grove! And it is not merely the house; the grounds, I assure you, as far as I could observe, are strikingly like. . . . My brother and sister will be enchanted with this place. People who have extensive grounds them-

selves are always pleased with anything in the same style.'" And in a few moments the poor woman is bragging about her brother's "barouche-landau." She is going to be kind to Jane Fairfax: "I shall certainly have her very often at my house, shall introduce her whenever I can, shall have musical parties to draw out her talents, and shall be constantly on the watch for an eligible situation. My acquaintance is so very extensive, that I have little doubt of hearing of something to suit her shortly. I shall introduce her, of course, very particularly to my brother and sister when they come to us. I am sure they will like her extremely; and when she gets a little acquainted with them,

her fears will completely wear off, for there really is nothing in the manners of either but what is highly conciliating. I shall have her very often indeed while they are with me; and I dare say we shall sometimes find a seat for her in the barouche-landau in some of our exploring parties.'" This simple bragging assumes a new hue a few pages farther on, when she bursts forth on social conditions. Mr. Weston had said of Mrs. Churchill, "'Her pride is arrogance and insolence. And what inclines one less to bear, she has no fair pretence of family or blood. She was nobody when he married her, barely the daughter of a gentleman; but ever since her being turned into a Churchill, she has out-Churchill'd

them all in high and mighty claims: but in herself, I assure you, she is an upstart.'

'"Only think! well, that must be infinitely provoking! I have quite a horror of upstarts. Maple Grove has given me a thorough disgust to people of that sort; for there is a family in that neighborhood who are such an annoyance to my brother and sister from the airs they give themselves! Your description of Mrs. Churchill makes me think of them directly. People of the name of Tupman, very lately settled there, and encumbered with many low connections, but giving themselves immense airs, and expecting to be on a footing with the old established families. A year and a half is the

very utmost that they can have lived at West Hall; and how they got their fortune, nobody knows. They came from Birmingham, which is not a place to promise much, you know, Mr. Weston. One has not great hopes from Birmingham. I always say there is something direful in the sound: but nothing more is positively known of the Tupmans, though a good many things, I assure you, are suspected; and yet by their manners they evidently think themselves equal even to my brother, Mr. Suckling, who happens to be one of their nearest neighbors. It is infinitely too bad. Mr. Suckling, who has been eleven years a resident at Maple Grove, and whose father had it before him — I believe, at least —

I am almost sure that old Mr. Suckling had completed the purchase before his death.'"

In the same way attention is called to the Coles, "who were of low origin, in trade, and only moderately genteel." They "were very respectable in their way, but they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them;" and Emma's lordly susceptibilities regarding their presumptuousness are well portrayed, and make very clear the considerable changes that had taken place during the last half of the eighteenth century. When we compare country life as we see it in Fielding's novels with the descriptions of Miss Austen, the difference is simply

enormous. It is as hard to imagine Squire Western or any of his family or friends tormented by these petty questions of social precedence, as it is to suppose them contented with the tepid delights of the heroes of the later novels: yet even in "Tom Jones" we find mention of some of the influences that were gradually taming boors and sots into human beings. Thus Squire Western, though rough as a cowboy, comes to London; we have seen in "Emma" references to her visits to Bath, which enjoyed a long reputation as a watering-place; and in Smollett's "Humphrey Clinker," there is frequent mention of the taste for travel which aided in breaking up rustic barbarity. What this had been, is

further shown in Fielding's "Joseph Andrews," and notably in the scene where the unfortunate hero first has the chair pulled from under him when he rises to say grace; then his ale is secretly strengthened by having gin poured into it; his wig is plucked from his head; a fire-cracker is fastened to his cassock, and set off; and finally he is soused over head and ears in a tub of water.

"Humphrey Clinker," which was published in 1771, bears some tokens of the change towards gentler customs, although the barbaric taint is yet tenacious of life. Thus, in Bramble's letter of June 26, the Yorkshire cousin, "too fat and unwieldy to leap ditches and five-bar gates," sits at home, and listens to the adven-

tures of the day's chase, while "his broad brawn is scratched by one of his grooms." "The house, though large, is neither elegant nor comfortable. It looks like a great inn, crowded with travellers, who dine at the landlord's ordinary, where there is a great profusion of victuals and drink. . . . The footmen might be aptly compared to the waiters of a tavern, if they were more serviceable and less rapacious; but they are generally insolent, inattentive, and so greedy, that I think I can dine better, and for less expense, at the Star and Garter in Pall Mall, than at our cousin's castle in Yorkshire. The squire . . . is also blessed with an only son, about two and twenty, just returned from Italy, a complete fiddler

and *dilettante;* and he slips no opportunity of manifesting the most perfect contempt for his own father."

This was the condition of affairs in a remote region. In the same book, letter of April 23, we have an account of the new splendors of Bath, already spoiled by the "slavery of maintaining a ceremonial more stiff, formal, and oppressive, than the etiquette of a German elector." After a description of the "growing excrescences" of the architecture, we are told: "All these absurdities arise from the general tide of luxury which hath overspread the nation, and swept away all, even the very dregs of the people. Every upstart of fortune, harnessed in the trappings of the mode, presents himself at Bath,

as in the very focus of observation. Clerks and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces; planters, negro-drivers, and hucksters from our American plantations, enriched they know not how; agents, commissaries, and contractors, who have fattened in two successive wars, on the blood of the nation; usurers, brokers, jobbers of every kind; men of low birth and no breeding, — have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence unknown to former ages, and no wonder that their brains should be intoxicated with pride, vanity, and presumption. Knowing no other criterion of greatness but the ostentation of wealth, they discharge their affluence with-

out taste or conduct, through every channel of the most absurd extravagance; and all of them hurry to Bath, because here, without any further qualification, they can mingle with the princes and nobles of the land. Even the wives of low tradesmen, who, like shovel-nosed sharks, prey upon the blubber of these uncouth whales of fortune, are infected with the same rage of displaying their importance; and the slightest indisposition serves them for a pretext to insist upon being conveyed to Bath, where they may hobble country-dances and cotillions among lordlings, squires, counsellors, and clergy. . . . Such is the composition of what is called the fashionable company at Bath; where a very inconsiderable

proportion of genteel people are lost in a mob of impudent plebeians, who have neither understanding nor judgment, nor the least idea of propriety and decorum; and seem to enjoy nothing so much as an opportunity of insulting their betters."

This long quotation clearly illustrates the crude beginnings of the new luxury which was to make over society; and in the letter of May 29, we may find an account of its appearance in London: "The tide of luxury has swept all the inhabitants from the open country. The poorest squire, as well as the richest peer, must have his house in town, and make a figure with an extraordinary number of domestics. . . . There are many causes that contribute to the

daily increase of this enormous mass, but they may be all resolved into the grand source of luxury and corruption. About five and twenty years ago [i.e., about 1750], very few even of the most opulent citizens of London kept any carriage, or even any servants in livery. Their tables produced nothing but plain boiled and roasted, with a bottle of port and a tankard of beer. At present every trader in any degree of credit, every broker and attorney, maintains a couple of footmen, a coachman, and postilion. He has his town-house and his country-house, his coach and his post-chaise. His wife and daughters appear in the richest stuffs, bespangled with diamonds. They frequent the court, the opera, the

theatre, and the masquerade. They hold assemblies at their own houses; they make sumptuous entertainments, and treat with the richest wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Champagne. . . . The gayest places of public entertainment are filled with fashionable figures, which, upon inquiry, will be found to be journeymen tailors, serving-men, and abigails, disguised like their betters.

"In short, there is no distinction or subordination left." The reader will recall Dr. Johnson's similarly worded lament: "The different departments of life are jumbled together. The hod-carrier, the low mechanic, the tapster, the publican, the shopkeeper, the pettifogger, the citizen, the courtier, *all tread upon the kibes of one another*," etc.

One perceives the rigid, uncorrupted moralist mourning the degeneracy of the age, regretting the golden past; and later, in the letter of Sept. 30, we find him describing the ruinous extravagance of women, and notably of Mrs. Baynard, whose "ruling passion was vanity, not that species which arises from self-conceit of superior accomplishments, but that which is of a bastard and idiot nature, excited by show and ostentation, which implies not even the least consciousness of any personal merit." Evidently, this Mrs. Baynard was a woman of the future; for "she could read, and write, and dance, and sing, and play upon the harpsichord, and smatter French, and take a hand at whist and ombre; but even these

accomplishments she possessed by halves." Naturally, a woman so richly endowed was dissatisfied with the country life of the time; and she is represented with much scorn as flinging away money right and left, in the endeavor to outshine her neighbors. She put a Grecian front on the Gothic façade of the old monastery in which they lived; she made her parlor "so very fine and delicate that, in all appearance, it was designed to be seen only, not inhabited. The chairs and couches were carved, gilt, and covered with rich damask, so smooth and sleek that they looked as if they had never been sat upon. There was no carpet on the floor; but the boards were rubbed and waxed in such a manner that we

could not walk, but were obliged to slide along them; and as for the stove, it was too bright and polished to be polluted with sea-coal, or stained by the smoke of any gross material fire." A woman capable of such enormities could not stop here: she had even taken her family to Italy, where they had kept many servants, and worn rich clothes, and there she was "continually surrounded by a train of expensive loungers under the denomination of language-masters, musicians, painters, and ciceroni; and had actually fallen into the disease of buying pictures and antiques upon her own judgment, which was far from being infallible." This record of the growth of modern luxury forms a pitiless indictment. Mrs.

Baynard turned a mill-stream full of trout into a basin, which at once became a huge morass; she sent a man five miles every morning to fetch hot rolls for breakfast; the dinner which she set before her guests "was made up of a parcel of kickshaws contrived by a French cook, without one substantial article adapted to the satisfaction of an English appetite," and it is described after a fashion that one would think might destroy even that. She was not alone in her frivolity; for her unhappy husband acknowledged that "he had two neighbors who, like himself, were driven by their wives at full speed in the high road to bankruptcy and ruin."

Then, in contrast with these mod-

ern extravagances, we have an account of Sir Thomas Bulford, a good representative of old-fashioned manners. Their superiority is shown by his habit of "exhibiting his guests in ludicrous attitudes." Thus, true to the instincts of uncorrupted courtesy, about three o'clock in a dark and stormy morning, he awakens his guests by a false alarm of fire; and his simple heart is delighted when one of them clambers down a ladder in his shirt and nightcap. After peace is restored, another gentleman is persuaded that some mushrooms he has eaten have poisoned him, and that he is about to die; while his illness really comes from the vile drugs his tormentors have dosed him with. In short, the glory of antiquity is

fully vindicated, the folly of modern times clearly exposed; and with every allowance for exaggeration, it is easy to see how far this horse-play was outgrown in the next thirty years under the influence of the refinement which is here so severely satirized, and yet survived, — for satire is as innocuous as it is sterile, — to make its appearance in countless forms. The slowness of the change may, however, be inferred from the incidents in "Evelina," where Madame Duval spits in the captain's face, and he in return shakes her, and threatens vengeance in kind for the affront, as well as where he, pretending to be a highwayman, plays a brutal trick. But in time these outbursts of violence wholly vanished; and alongside

of decorum there appeared in the world new sources of pleasure, which Smollett's Matthew Bramble and Sir Thomas Bulford would scarcely have recognized as possible contributions to human happiness. Faint traces of these new delights found their way into Miss Austen's stories, and again under a cloud of satire, albeit this naturally shares in the general advance towards urbanity. In "Persuasion" the change is noticed; thus it is said of the Musgroves, that they, "like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and the mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new;" but even the older couple forbore to duck their guests in tubs or horse-ponds, al-

though they were "not much educated, and not at all elegant." Probably the most marked difference between the two generations would have been in regard to the value of the picturesque, and of the modern school of poetry. In "Sense and Sensibility," for example, Edward Ferrars is at great pains to express his lack of sympathy with the new affection for the picturesque; he assures the enthusiastic Marianne that he has no knowledge of it. "I shall offend you," he tells her, "by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only

to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. . . . I call it a very fine country: the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug, — with rich meadows and several neat farmhouses scattered here and there. It exactly answers my ideas of a fine country, because it unites beauty with utility." And farther on he adds, "I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles or thistles, or heath-blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farmhouse than a

watch-tower, and a troop of happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world." Very different from this young gentleman is the fantastic Marianne, who nearly comes to her death by walking at twilight in the most distant part of the grounds, "where the trees were the oldest, and the grass was the longest and wettest;" and in general, the story shows the perils attending excessive devotion to these new-fangled ideas. In "Northanger Abbey," again, we find the love of old buildings good-naturedly ridiculed. The general sanity of Miss Austen's novels attests the presence of a safe dilution of modernness among the people of the little set that she described; while in "Pride and Pre-

judice" we have snobbishness portrayed with equal novelty in the account of Mr. Collins and of his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh. We have not found other instances of the peculiar awe with which that lady impressed her faithful admirer, either, in those novels of Miss Austen of which mention has been made; and since here it is described in connection with an admiration for rocks and mountains (see the end of chapter xxvii.) its origin may at least be taken to be identical in time as that of the other. "What are men," cries Elizabeth, speaking of a projected tour to the Lakes, "to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport shall we spend!" And quite as novel as the grandeur of any

impressive scenery is the grandeur of Lady Catherine. If we had found frequent descriptions of social trepidation in other and earlier writers, it would not seem like any thing of modern growth; but in fact we do not. Even the young Tom Branghton's cry, "Miss has danced with a lord!" is a mere recognition of social distinction beside Miss Austin's picture of self-abasement in the cringing airs of Mr. Collins and the terror that animated Maria Lucas and her father. "Such formidable accounts of her ladyship, and her manner of living, quite frightened Maria Lucas, who had been little used to company; and she looked forward to her introduction at Rosings with as much apprehension as her father had done to

his presentation at St. James's. . . . When they ascended the steps to the hall, Maria's alarm was every moment increasing, and even Sir William did not look perfectly calm. Elizabeth's courage did not fail her. She had heard nothing of Lady Catherine that spoke her awful from any extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money and rank she thought she could witness without trepidation." And she succeeded perfectly. "In spite of having been at St. James's, Sir William was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding him, that he had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat without saying a word; and his daughter, frightened almost out of

her senses, sat on the edge of her chair, not knowing which way to look. Elizabeth found herself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three ladies before her comfortably."

In short, she was a thoroughly sensible young person, who was not intimidated by the imposing splendor of the great. And it is interesting to notice that in this novel, which was finished in 1798, we have the earliest picture that has reached us of this new dignity of a person of position, and of the awe that it strikes into the ordinary human heart. Other writers during the eighteenth century observed their kind, and recorded in fiction the result of their studies: they have described vul-

garity, insolence, arrogance, humiliation, and a long list of virtues and vices; more serious writers, like Dr. Johnson, in his "Lives of the Poets," have sought for anecdotes that should present certain men in an unfavorable light. The essayists scrutinized with special care the social relations of their contemporaries: yet none of them recognized this effulgent splendor of the great, or this depression that it produced in their social satellites. What, then, must we suppose? That it was the universal condition, and so eluded notice like breathing or sleeping? This is impossible; because we have enough testimony to show that while the difference of social conditions was everywhere felt and acknowledged, this recognition

produced no such humiliating results. Men took their place in society as a lieutenant takes his place at dress-parade near his men, without feeling degraded because the field-officers are remote. It was only when the aristocracy felt its security imperilled, that it fell back on this protection, and outsiders renewed their allegiance by the exercise of these more or less extravagant rites, which have a side in common with the general renewal of men's belief in something great outside of themselves.

The satirical position which Jane Austen takes in this novel, and the self-respect of her heroine which contrasts so vividly with the tumultuous embarrassment of her companions, indicate the way in which this altera-

tion of manners struck a woman who belonged to what was best in the eighteenth century; and certainly to that period is due the credit of all her sanity and sweet reasonableness. Her books, as we have seen, are full of gentle raps at the new-fangled enthusiasms over solemn scenery, haunted ruins, and all the paraphernalia of romanticism; and in the passages just quoted we may read her verdict concerning snobbishness, — their contemporary, and to some extent their partner.

XIII.

Of the further development of this quality, it is not necessary to speak at length. Its flourishing existence, along with the general belief in an ideal, is, one may say, a matter of record. Its respect for hallowed pomp made itself manifest in many curious ways, and not in England alone. Some of Balzac's novels attest his cringing awe before mysterious duchesses endowed with superhuman beauty and fascination; which is as valuable a token of the reaction against the Revolution, as was Napoleon's desire to be crowned with religious ceremonies.

It only remains to consider the relations between the modern plutocracy and snobbishness. That money is to all intents and purposes now omnipotent, no serious-minded person will deny; and its new and raw possessor, as we see in countless instances, at once endeavors to adapt himself to a state of society in which aristocratic principles still flourish. He puts himself in the hands of a parasite who, for board and luxury, shall teach his patron to distinguish between Hochheimer and Johannisberger, between Médoc and more delicate clarets, and how to tell the different soups, the order of dishes at dinner, etc., without apparent effort. The mere possession of vast wealth is not alone enough, perhaps,

to insure an inevitable advance ; but the desire for social progress, combined with a little tact, will accomplish every thing in time. What may be a little difficult at home, where jealousy and envy keep one's neighbors' memory in abnormal activity, becomes very simple abroad, where good society does not distinguish between foreigners, and smiles at these fanciful distinctions. There, any taint that may unfit him for success at home is not observed. He elbows the greatest, and enjoys every triumph. To be sure, the doors through which he so easily enters are like those attached to public buildings, and swing in both directions ; but with those poor wretches who fall out we have nothing to do : those

who stay in alone concern us. It is to be noticed, that they are gradually becoming aware that they are the real possessors of power; that taste, intelligence, ability, energy, exist but for their service; and that even the long-intrenched aristocracy is only a useful means of delight for the rich. Already a poor nobleman who tries to hide his nakedness with leaves from his family tree is a most despised object: power is shifting from lineage and title to wealth, and the possessor of this qualification will be sure to receive the respect which is always given to power. By its ready worship of mammon, the aristocracy is cultivating wood for its own guillotine. The change is perceptible to every observer who will notice the

lessening of respect for mere length of lineage, and the common habit of regarding coats-of-arms and such symbols of antiquity as mere affectations. Especially is this true of America, where "daddyism" has long been laughed at, and pride of family is the coldest comfort and but a meagre support. That this form of vanity has existed and still exists, no one who knows the facts will deny; but the general tendency of the country is against it. It survives as a condition of respectability or gentility; but outside of what faint theoretic reverence it may extort, it has no practical value. The old helmet of a Crusader would be as valuable for modern wear as descent from him would be useful in money-getting.

It should be said, however, that if *le monde s'américanise*, as despondent European critics are prone to say, it will alter slowly, for one peculiarly American quality is its intense conservatism; it is not Anglo-Saxon for nothing, and it adheres with, on the whole, wonderful tenacity to what has won the approval of Europe. These questions, it seems, will rather be decided by the Russians, who appear to be destined to take the place long held by the French; that, namely, of becoming the Greeks of modern times, — in other words, the people who shall carry out their ideas in action, who put their theories into practice. We are least of all a nation that lives on ideas. There is scanty room for them here, with all

our territory: it is in the application of steam, the invention of machinery, that we are interested; here we have no equal. Our excellence is in devising methods of saving labor; and the invention and promulgation of theories requires the severest toil.

As matters stand, it may be safely asserted that illustrious descent is, in this country at least, an interesting decoration, like a suit of armor in a corner of a hall; but it is the rich, no matter how obscure their origin, who are the real objects of interest and envy. To be sure, those who amass wealth adorn their acquisitions with various heraldic devices, as a matter of fashion; but it is not these coats-of-arms, or their newly bought family

portraits, that inspire respect. Those, we feel, are but concessions to an expiring notion of aristocratic belongings: they are not an essential part of social position as they were in the past. The threatening problems of the present day are not those that concern a privileged aristocracy, but those that demand a settlement of the various claims to wealth. Mere aristocracy is a luxury for those who care for it: it is not a living question. The disposition to adorn people with extraneous majesty is practically extinct, or on the way to extinction; but the world is interested in the distribution of dollars and cents, and in those who have succeeded in acquiring this desirable art. They are the great of this world, before whom

drawing-rooms and palaces are open, who are tempted by the offer of all that politics can present; who are, indeed, the masters of the world.

There is one advantage: there is no mystery about them, as it was supposed that there was about the aristocracy who enjoyed a monopoly of aquiline noses, eagle eyes, curved lips, glossy raven or curling light hair, as fashion swayed, almond-shaped nails, arched insteps, graceful gait, small hands and feet, and, above all, a somewhat scornful air, which was the despair of outsiders. This was what we call their uniform, which indicated a host of qualities no less imposing, and even more unlike the customary traits of human nature. They were intenser than most people, and far

more serious, for they lived up to their dazzling exterior; they were as exempt from pettinesses, as their lives were free from sordid care. They were always on parade, it seemed; and as a child imagines a king wearing his crown all day, perched upon a throne, with a sceptre forever in his hand, and even sleeping with several pounds weight of metal and jewels on his uneasy head, so the aristocracy of birth or genius was separated from the multitude, who were alone capable of being cross, unreasonable, bored, uncertain, and petty. The very vices of the great shared their magnificent superiority to customary sins, as we may see in the mysterious veil wherein Byron enwrapped himself while

under the influence of gin, and in the wide-spread notion that there was something grand in the inevitable viciousness of genius. Indeed, the whole conception of genius as something that lifted its possessor far above the common herd by an inexplicable quality — an idea which was carefully nurtured by writers who had the ear of the public — was one that had wide ramifications; and demigods acquired full rights of citizenship in modern society. Genius became as ready and satisfactory an explanation of every form of conspicuous merit, as instinct of the actions of animals; and in the lordly company of those who possessed it the ordinary qualities of human nature appeared unworthy of contemplation.

The great-man theory ruled triumphant in literature as in society, and snobbishness was one of the forms in which its recognition found expression. It was the perception of a mysterious quality which could be shared by all people of position, who were willing to accept its responsibilities; what these responsibilities were, fashionable life shows.

When a plutocracy is in power, this glamour disappears. Yet, of course, much of the machinery of former splendor survives, just as people use horses in the days of steam; but it lingers as a temptation to extravagance, and as a warrantable source of lavish expenditure, rather than as the impressive thing that it was in times past. The mystery is gone when

robbing a bank will suffice to fit one for greatness, and the first question asked is how much a man can spend. With these altered conditions, snobbishness must change, and does change. It loses the side whereby it was related to the admiration of the dignity of life, and becomes a practical worship of the material side of worldly success. Whereas — although the habit of thus labelling and subdividing human qualities is most dangerous — the exaggerated worship of an aristocracy bore in the past some of the marks of pride, the ostentation of money getters and spenders is apt to degenerate into mere vanity, the idlest display, — possibly instances will suggest themselves to our readers, — and since this

extravagance has a merely commercial measure, like so much lace or so many jewels, it becomes a subject to be treated by political economy, not one that appeals to even fanciful reverence. This is the position, as has just been said, that society is apparently beginning to take, or rather preparing to take, about it: all title-deeds are to be examined. Hence we may say, perhaps, that as snobbishness is the exaggeration, or, apparently, the evil application, of a way of looking at the world that has been full of fruit, so the present worship of money is at bottom a frank acceptance of things as they are, which is in many respects a commendable action. Whether the frank worship of wealth is in itself, how-

ever, a commendable thing, each one may decide for himself: the answer will be recorded by some future historian.

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